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THE

CHURCH IN POLITICS IN ONTARIO.

*An Address delivered before the Annual Convention of the
Canadian Secular Union, Sept. 9, 1894.*

By R. H. FALCONER.

During almost a hundred and fifty years Europe was afflicted by religious wars, religious massacres, and religious persecutions ; not one of which would have arisen if the great truth had been recognized, that the state has no concern with the opinions of men, and no right to interfere, even in the slightest degree, with the form of worship which they may choose to adopt.

Buckle's Hist. of Civilization in England, Vol. I.

Toronto :

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"Keep Church and State forever separate."
Gen. U. S. Grant.

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The Church in Politics

IN ONTARIO

BY R. H. FALCONER.

A VERY prevalent idea among the Canadian people is that in this country absolute separation exists between Church and State. Nothing could be more fallacious.

It is true there is no State-established Church, that absolute religious equality exists that no one church is preferred before another, and that none enjoy privileges that are not freely granted to all denominations alike. And yet there is a close connection existing between Church and State in the Province of Ontario.

It is not that there is discrimination in favor of one religious sect as against another, but that the purely secular functions of the State are diverted into establishing and sustaining a multiplicity of religious factions in the country.

I take it that it is a generally admitted fact that the peculiar office of the Church is quite distinct from that of the State: the one spiritual, the other secular; the one the propagation of certain religious tenets, the other the exercise of the civil functions of government. Hence it is quite true that the Church has no more valid reason for interfering in the public affairs of the State than the State has for intermeddling in the domain of religion. If the Church can be justified in endeavoring to regulate the temporal affairs of the State, then the State is justified in regulating the religious belief of the nation. (Applause.) Such a system as that, while it would establish one uniform national system of belief, would destroy the last vestige of mental freedom, and abolish forever the right of free inquiry and investigation. (Applause.)

There are those, however, who will object to this conclusion and claim that the Church has a perfect right to exercise her moral influence and guidance, in the affairs of the State, as a moral agency. This objection I absolutely deny. The history of the world teaches that when in possession of political power the Church, regardless of creeds, has proved a detriment to mankind (applause), it has been the prolific cause of inter-

national hatred, it has made aliens of kindred peoples in a common country, it has retarded progress, it has borne false witness against civilization, it has restricted liberty, denounced learning, and with respect to morality let England's great historian, Macaulay, answer :—

"It is an unquestionable and most instructive fact, that the years during which the Anglican *hierarchy* were in the zenith, were precisely the years during which national virtue was at the lowest point." (History of England, Vol. I, page 141). And going further back to the period of the Byzantine Empire, when the power of the Church was supreme, and when ecclesiastical authority exercised absolute control of the State, we find the record equally as unsatisfactory to the claims of Church-Stateism. Leech, in his "History of European Morals," says of this model church government :—"The universal verdict of history is that it constitutes, with scarcely an exception, the most thoroughly base and despicable form that civilization has yet assumed."

But, sir, not only is the evidence of modern history against the assumption that the Church wields an influence for good when permitted to control any of the functions of the State, but there is an abundant evidence of a very recent date in the as yet brief history of Canada, confirming that view.

In 1867 on the northern half of this continent there was established a young nationality of great promise. Its component parts were the happy blending of two noble races that had long warred as hereditary foes. But with the usuring in of the embryo nation peace and good will was proclaimed, the hatchet of creed and racial diversities were to be buried in the past of other years. There were to be no invidious distinctions of race. None were henceforth to be known as Frenchmen or as Englishmen, as Irishmen or as Scotchmen, but each would proudly claim his Canadian citizenship. A country endowed with nature's richest gifts and on whose birth there smiled the genius of romance. The Constitution was the ripest expression of Democracy—each citizen an enthroned sovereign, the people freely entrusted with all the grand prerogatives of responsible government. Bright was the picture of this country, and but for one circumstance, it can truthfully be said, that scarcely a shadow darkened the horizon of her future resplendency. But that circumstance was destined to unwork all the grand consummation of National Confederacy, and bright, as an early frost, the cherished ambition of the Canadian people for harmonious and united solidity. That circumstance was the intervention of the Church in the affairs of the State, and the introduction of the curse of sectarian greed.

Separate Schools.

The affirmation in the British North American Act, which constituted the Dominion of Canada, of the privileges which the Church had enjoyed prior to Confederation, was undoubtedly the greatest mistake in the Constitutional history of Canada. The granting of the privilege of state-sustained denominational education has been the one bulwark behind which the old hostile feeling between the two races in British North America have entrenched themselves and prevented a full and free assimilation of the two races into one common nationality. Not only is the establishment of denominational education a violation of the civil functions of government, and an improper diversion of public money into sectarian channels, but it is equally indefensible as a matter of public policy. There is no good and efficient reason why all the people of this country, to whatever sect they may belong, should not send their children to the same common schools to receive the ordinary branches of instruction. The possession by the Church of the privilege of teaching so-called "Christian education" in the schools, every year entails upon this province an enormous extra expense by reason of a needless duplication of the school-staff, etc., that is not justified. And I venture to say that all the other causes of discord and strife and ill-feeling in the Province combined have not entailed such aggravated evils upon us as this one question of church endowments, for that is really what it means. Heretofore, education had to a very large extent been monopolized by the classes. The masses had but little opportunity of acquiring even the bare rudiments of education, but with the founding of the common school system of Ontario this has been changed, and a very general diffusion of education made possible. This is undoubtedly the grandest triumph of the age. With its introduction the latent genius of the race expanded into science, art, literature and invention.

The people of Ontario enjoying these great blessings should be very jealous that nothing is done to impair the efficiency and the stability of that system. But that is not what Separate schools are calculated to maintain; on the contrary they prove a constant menace to its stability by dividing it up into sectarian factions, and detracting from its efficiency, by the supervision which the church is permitted to exercise over it, resulting in the employment of unqualified teachers and the discardment of some of the most important branches of study in order that Church doctrine and ecclesiastical history may find a place in the school. The conclusion which every thoughtful and candid student of politics in this country must

arrive at, after a careful survey of the whole history of the aggrandisement of the Church is very well expressed in a *Toronto Mail* editorial on June 2nd 1894:—"The aim," the writer says, "of ecclesiastical policy commencing with the control of the schools and ending with the control of the voter seems to be the subordination of the State to the Church. That the history of the State in its relation to the Church can convince any rational mind that this sort of thing is tolerable there is every reason to doubt. Let the Church have all the influence for good that is in its sphere, but from the political domain it should be sternly excluded."

Ecclesiastical Corporations.

Nor is Church connection restricted to the School system of the Province, but in many other respects she claims State recognition and sustenance. Charitable institutions of an avowedly sectarian character receive public appropriations. No rational person would object to a liberal and judicious expenditure of public money in the maintenance of the unfortunate and the afflicted, but the State is not justified in appropriating out of the common fund of a people, so diverse in nationality and creed as the people of Canada are, a sum which largely enriches some ecclesiastical corporation and which tends to strengthen the sinews of sectarian nurseries. According to the statement of Mr. F. F. Chamberlain, Inspector of Public Charities, there are ninety of these sectarian charitable institutions in the Province of Ontario alone, drawing from the provincial government one hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars annually. Why do the Churches cling tenaciously to separate charities? For the same reason that they object to paying for their legitimate share of taxation, and because they find these institutions a good financial investment, providing a substantial profit that may be devoted to other branches of Church work.

Church Exemptions.

Exemption from taxation is another case in point exhibiting the close relationship between Church and State in Ontario. Such exemption is virtually State support and therefore contrary to the true instincts of the age. It is difficult to understand what good or efficient reason can be advanced against the contention that the Church, like other institutions of the land, should not contribute her fair quota in maintaining the expenses of the municipality. Free police and fire protection, free water and all other adjuncts of a well-regulated municipality, are on a par with the pastor who wants a free newspaper, a generous discount off his grocery bill, or a reduced railroad

fare. (Applause). It is an unholy exhibition of selfishness. Then, again, all churches should be on the same footing. If you exempt a magnificent church edifice, situated on a fashionable thoroughfare, you discriminate by the amount of difference in exemption against the more modest looking structure located, perhaps, in a less fashionable quarter of the city. From all these considerations I would conclude that the only just and equitable settlement to all classes and creeds of the question is to abolish exemptions entirely, and let each sect stand on its own bottom. (Applause.)

The employment of chaplains in parliament, in provincial legislatures, in the militia and in the prisons, asylums and other institutions, supported by public money, the appointment of religious festivals and fasts, laws directly or indirectly enforcing the observance of Sunday or the Sabbath, and the appointment to positions of high political honor in the provincial legislature, and in the parliament of Canada of representatives of sectarian denominations, are all evidences of the wide departure from the rightfully secular functions of government, and as they constitute privileges and advantages granted to Christianity as a special religion should be abrogated.

Time will not admit of a reference to all these anomalies, but I desire before I conclude to refer briefly to the principle of appointment of sectarian representation in the Cabinet of the Dominion and local governments, because it brings out in clearer shades the absurdity and sophistry of the Church-State idea. The large Christian denominations in Canada have direct representation in the cabinet, which may be termed the Executive committee of parliament. These representatives are appointed to preside over important public departments, not because of their business excellence and peculiar knowledge and fitness for an honest and efficient discharge of the duties devolving upon them, in connection with that department, indeed it not unfrequently happens that the premier has abundant material of much abler calibre, but these sectarian representatives receive the appointment, in many cases because they are the only representative a given sect has returned to parliament from the ministerial side of the House. Hence, in circumstances of this kind, the leader of the government in forming his cabinet is compelled to select a much less experienced and inferior man, while he has a score of supporters in parliament, who if merit alone had governed the selection would have gained the appointment. That the country has suffered severely from this system of sectarian representation the many mismanaged departments of government bear eloquent testimony to. What business man would think of applying this principle to the selection of his office staff, or of

the allotment of positions of trust and responsibility in his establishment? What ridicule would be thrown at a joint stock company or a bank that elected to its board of directors a nicely proportioned representation from the different creeds of its stock holders? It is unbusinesslike and ridiculous in the extreme.

I have not been able to obtain any reliable figures on the amount of exempted church property in Ontario, but the following schedule, compiled from the revised assessment roll for the City of Toronto, 1894, will give some idea of the acquisition of vast amounts of untaxed church property going on in the province: -

Episcopalian	\$1,597,660
Roman Catholic	1,394,097
Methodist	1,139,400
Presbyterian	1,124,512
Baptist	563,225
Congregationalist	211,523
Unitarian	37,838
Jewish Synagogues	17,995
Salvation Army	86,122
Other minor denominations	183,752
Y.M.C.A.	73,852
Y.W.C. Guild	33,534
Y.W.C. Association	40,520
W.C. Temperance Union	14,500
St. Andrews Christian Institute	13,750
Total	\$6,532,280

Or, over six millions in exempted church property in the city of Toronto alone. This amount is exclusive of cemeteries, private schools, hospitals, and other so-called charitable institutions and consists of only the amount invested in places of worship alone. This vast estate receives all the protection and benefits of government without contributing a single farthing towards defraying the expenses of the same, while it places an immense burden on the tax payers,—a burden which they have no option in incurring and over which they have absolutely no control. Since church property is not assessable the same care is not exercised in obtaining its market value that is exercised in regard to property upon which a tax rate can be levied. Thus church property is always estimated far below its real value. Then, again, in a growing country, where real estate increases in value so rapidly with time, as in Ontario, there is scarcely a limit to the wealth that may be

acquired by corporations, religious or otherwise, if allowed to retain real estate without taxation.

In conclusion let me say that the Church should be sternly driven from politics. Its recognition has tended to create selfish and jealous feelings in the country, embittered the daily relations of the people, intensifying sectarian rivalry for office and pelf, retarded civilization, and in every way proved a detriment to the progress and happiness of the human race. (Applause).



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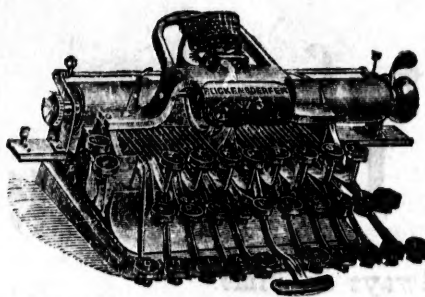
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